



City of Seattle

Mike McGinn, Mayor

Seattle Human Rights Commission

Chris Stearns, Chairman

Statement of Chris Stearns, Chairman, Seattle Human Rights Commission

Hearing on the Mayor's 20/20 Plan and the Department of Justice Investigation Seattle City Council Committee on Public Safety, Civil Rights and Technology

April 18, 2012

Good afternoon Chairman Harrell and Committee members. On behalf of the Seattle Human Rights Commission I would like to thank you for calling this hearing.

The Commission was founded nearly 50 years ago to protect and advocate for justice, human rights, and the equal treatment of all people who live and work in Seattle.

There are several key human rights, enshrined in international declarations and covenants which the United States has signed, that we believe should guide the City of Seattle as it works to reform its police department to best serve its people.

First is the principle of dignity and humane treatment. We believe that the Consent Decree which you are negotiating must include new standards and reporting requirements so that the community and the monitor can actually measure whether police uses of excessive force decrease or increase.

Second is the principle of redress and an effective remedy. As we have testified in the past, human rights law requires that citizens have the ability to obtain due process and an appropriate remedy when their rights are violated. We believe that means that the City of Seattle must create an independent citizens commission that has the power to investigate allegations of police misconduct and make its own findings of fact. The creation of a citizens commission would help rebuild community trust in the police department and improve the overall quality of police investigations.

The third principle is equal treatment before law. We believe that the Consent Decree must include the development of rigorous baselines to accurately measure whether or not biased policing exists in Seattle. The baselines should be based on work already conducted by The Defender Association's Racial Disparity Project and examine police use of force, drug arrests, false arrests, pedestrian stops, and gang-related arrests.

We urge the City to adopt these reforms in a Consent Decree that includes a court appointed monitor and maximum community participation. We are proud to join with community leaders in the fight to restore justice and safety on the streets.

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